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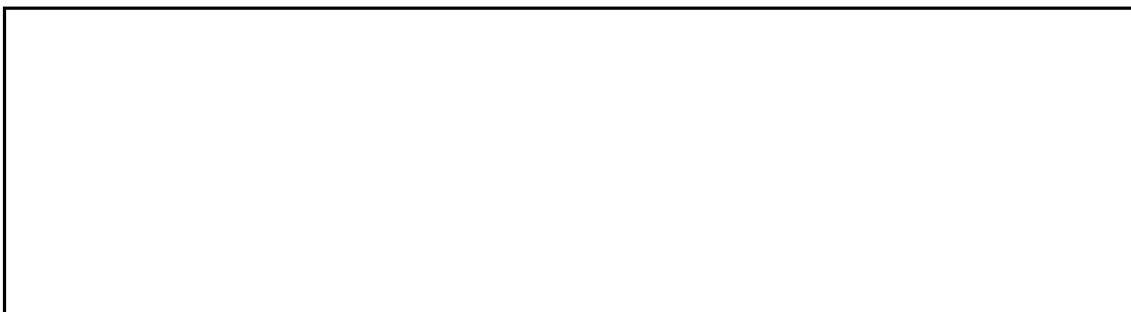
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NORTH VIETNAM: Hanoi's flat rejection of President Nixon's peace proposals indicates the Communists see little, if any, room for negotiations in the present situation.

Coming a week after the President spoke, the North Vietnamese foreign ministry statement was clearly a carefully considered response. It probably reflects a view that, with the imponderables in the given situation, an unyielding public stance on basic issues is a better tactic than a flexible one. It also shows that Hanoi has ruled out making a major counterproposal to the President's initiative any time soon, and that for now the Communists intend to stick to the tough line taken in the Viet Cong's eight points last month.

Beyond these propaganda considerations, the present mood in Hanoi is as murky as ever. Among other things, the Communists seem bent on trying to improve their power position on the ground in Indochina during the next few months.

As for the negotiations, Hanoi's attitude is summed up briefly in its charge that President Nixon was "vague" on the two key issues: troop withdrawals and the shape of a postwar political structure in South Vietnam. Future Communist diplomatic and political probes probably will be designed to ascertain what else the US may have to say on these matters. Any substantive movement on Hanoi's part is likely to be glacial at best, especially if the Communists believe they can be in a better military position by the end of the current phase of US troop withdrawals next spring. [REDACTED]

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SOUTH VIETNAM: American and Communist casualties have dropped sharply this year, but the war is still exacting a substantial toll of South Vietnamese forces.

So far this year, the average number of South Vietnamese soldiers killed each week has equaled last year's rate of over 360. During the past three months, however, government losses have been lower, averaging about 230 killed each week. US casualties, in contrast, have averaged some 95 killed each week this year. These are approximately half the 1969 toll, and in recent weeks they have been considerably less than that.

According to reports from the field, Communist killed-in-action losses in South Vietnam are down by nearly one-third this year, although they are still reported to be losing an average of more than 2,000 troops a week. This does not include estimates of Communist losses incurred while fighting Cambodian and Laotian forces.

These figures point up how both American and North Vietnamese regular units have scaled down the size and intensity of their operations in the war in South Vietnam, even though Viet Cong units reinforced by North Vietnamese troops have continued to press on with the guerrilla struggle. Incidents of small-scale enemy attacks, terrorism, and sabotage this year are higher than last, and these have been directed primarily against South Vietnamese forces.

The drop in both Communist and allied casualties during the past summer can be explained in part by allied operations in Cambodia which disrupted enemy sanctuaries in the Vietnam-Cambodia border area and by the subsequent shift of many Communist units

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from the border area deeper into Cambodia. In addition, enemy attacks in South Vietnam usually subside during the summer when much of the country is flooded by monsoon rains. If the Communists follow previous patterns, increases in guerrilla activity and some renewed main force action--and thus higher allied and enemy casualties--can be expected during the coming dry season. [REDACTED]

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NOTES

JAPAN: Prime Minister Sato yesterday made the long-expected formal announcement of his candidacy for another term as party president and therefore as prime minister. This will give the 69-year-old Sato an unprecedented fourth consecutive term, because only token opposition is expected at the Liberal Democratic Party election on 29 October. He may step down before his next term runs out, however, if he can assure the succession of a suitable candidate to carry on Sato's conservative policies. Opposition among powerful party leaders to his present favorite apparently was a major factor in his decision to remain in office. [REDACTED]

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